

VZCZCXRO0424  
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA  
DE RUEHUJA #0631/01 0891613  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 301613Z MAR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9069  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0209  
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0207  
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 6499  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: INEC: PREPARATIONS FOR 2003 VS. 2007 ELECTIONS

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SUMMARY  
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11. (SBU) Begin Summary: The current posture of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and preparations for the 2007 elections raise worrisome echoes of the failures of 2003, when preparations were inadequate and polling itself was embroiled in disarray, misconduct and confrontation. The inadequacies observed in 2003 appear accentuated in 2007. Preparations for the 2003 and 2007 elections share some common features: inconclusive voter registration, inability of the electorate to view the voter roll, lack of voter education, late recruitment of ad-hoc staff, lack of information about polling units and many other issues. Unlike during the 2003 elections, there have been numerous pre-election legal challenges in the run-up to the 2007, owing largely to what analysts have described as the dubious role of INEC: principally its relationship with the incumbent government and a general inability to provide a level playing field for political parties and candidates. END SUMMARY.

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TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO INEC FOR 2007 ELECTIONS  
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12. (U) In a communique issued at the end of a post election workshop attended by various stakeholders in Kaduna after the 2003 elections, it was resolved that INEC required technical support in various aspects of election administration to ensure the 2007 elections were better managed and more credible. Organizations like USAID, DFID, the European Union, and the UNDP, working through agencies like IFES, IRI and NDI, provided training in specialized areas to various stakeholders of the electoral process including INEC. This support was to address technical and other identifiable hurdles that would threaten credible elections in 2007. Analysts insist that INEC has the technical competence required for a credible election but lacks the political will to be an unbiased umpire in the process. This lack of political will could be attributable to the status of INEC as an extension of the Presidency.

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HOW INEC'S LEADERSHIP EMERGED  
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¶3. (U) The emergence of INEC's leadership is a fundamental challenge to the independence of the Commission. There is a striking resemblance in the way INEC leadership emerged in 2003 and 2007. The Dr Abel Guobadia-led- INEC had direct links with the incumbent administration in 2003. Guobadia was appointed by President Obasanjo on the recommendation of Chief Tony Anenih, a member of the ruling PDP top brass and a chief strategist for the re-election of Obasanjo. All the federal INEC Commissioners were believed to be card-carrying members of the PDP and were openly partisan in the discharge of their duties. Directors of the Commission, meant to be career civil servants, were also appointed based on their affiliations either with the then-leadership of INEC or the incumbent administration. Guobadia worked for the Presidency and would not yield to advice or pressure from other quarters. His catch phrase then in reaction to public criticism was "nobody should tell me how to do my job."

¶4. (SBU) It is also common knowledge within political circles that Professor Maurice Iwu, the current INEC Chairman, has strong links to the Obasanjo administration. Iwu was introduced to President Obasanjo by one of his closest aides - Special Adviser on Domestic Affairs, Dr. Andy Uba, who is also the governorship candidate for the PDP in Anambra state. Though Iwu's Commissioners were also appointed in a similar manner to those in 2003, there are indications that some of them hold different views about their expectations of what INEC's role should be. There have been media reports of major disagreements between Iwu and some of the Commissioners on disqualification of candidates, particularly of Vice President Atiku Abubakar. Iwu has been accused of shutting out candidates that might pose a

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challenge to his godfather in Anambra state, Andy Uba. Iwu reportedly walked out of an internal INEC meeting and allegedly told the Commissioners that he would do what President Obasanjo told him to do and asked them to resign if they were not "loyal to the President." Although some analysts believe Iwu should be fired as "he has left the impression of being servile to the president, partial to the ruling party and willing to make baffling choices," they caution that a change in INEC at this point could lead to a breach of the Constitution and a delay in the elections.

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LOGISTICS FOR 2003 ELECTIONS  
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¶5. (U) Less than three weeks to the elections in 2003, there were still unresolved logistical problems with the election preparations. The National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center issued a pre-election statement on March 28, 2003 expressing worries about the state of preparations for that election. The statement read in part "NDI and The Carter Center are deeply concerned that deficiencies and other flaws related to the organization and conduct of the upcoming elections, if not addressed and corrected, could irreparably harm public faith in the country's democratic process." The crucial logistical challenges of that election were voter registration and the status of the voter roll, security, observer accreditation and general confidence in the electoral process. Voter registration was greatly manipulated and the voter roll not adequately displayed as required by the Electoral Act. There was widespread political violence across the country; INEC provisions for accrediting domestic observers were extremely cumbersome and electoral irregularities were anticipated. On the other hand, details about locations of polling stations and copies of sample ballot papers were made available to Diplomatic missions well ahead of the start of elections. This same information has not yet been shared with the public or diplomatic mission at

just over 2 weeks prior to the 2007 polls.

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LOGISTICS FOR 2007 ELECTIONS  
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¶6. (U) The preparedness of INEC for the 2007 elections has been a source of concern for most stakeholders in the Nigerian democratic process. Political parties, civil society organizations and regional groupings across the country have at various times doubted the preparedness and even the capacity of INEC to conduct credible elections in 2007. The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), which is a coalition of civil society organizations with a focus on electoral process, and the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), the major regional group for northern Nigeria, have publicly expressed doubts about INEC's preparedness for the April elections.

¶7. (U) Preparations started on a very shaky note with the introduction of electronic voter registration and all the attendant problems of a new technology in a country with little functioning infrastructure. The exercise started late with an inadequate number of (generally) malfunctioning machines, a lack of information and outright fraud. There were allegations of diversions of the Direct Data Capture (DDC) machines mostly by members of the ruling political party. The voter roll has still not been properly displayed for challenges and amendments as required by law. Though INEC declared it had registered about 61.5 million voters, it is not clear how many of those registered voters will be able to cast their votes as INEC "reserves the right to determine how many of those registered voters are valid." It is also not clear how INEC intends to merge the registrations from the direct data capture (DDC) machines and registrations from the locally configured laptop computers. Analysts fear there might not be a credible voter roll for the elections as virtually no one outside of INEC has seen a copy. The INEC Chair on March 13, 2007 said permanent voter cards to replace the paper receipts some voters received when they registered were being printed but did not disclose distribution mechanism. (NOTE: Some voters received no proof of registration and we now hear that INEC may not distribute the

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permanent cards at all. END NOTE.)

¶8. (U) Less than a month before the 2007 elections, it is not clear to the Nigerian public where polling units will be located, what the ballot papers look like, which domestic observer groups will be accredited, or what is INEC's policy on election observation. These major outstanding questions have continued to create anxiety and suspicion amongst both stakeholders and the general public, with some fearing that the incumbent administration does not intend to relinquish power. Though the House of Representatives on March 13, 2007 grudgingly endorsed INEC's preparations for the April elections, Nigerians, taking into account the widespread litigations, disqualification of opposition candidates and electoral violence that has been on the increase, are far from being convinced INEC was serious about conducting elections.

¶9. (SBU) While President Obasanjo was reported to have said he had no misgivings about foreign observers monitoring and commenting on the conduct of the next elections, Professor Iwu seems more predisposed to shutting out observer groups. He had allegedly sought to put in caveats designed to restrict the freedom of election observers. Civil society organizations are however resolute on closely monitoring the process. Mr. Emma Ezeazu of the Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE) had reportedly insisted "with or without accreditation, Nigerians were going to monitor the elections for which communities, unions and associations had already been mobilized."

¶10. (U) On March 14, 2007, INEC placed the first

advertisements in national dailies calling for applications for recruitment of the estimated 500,000 ad-hoc staff needed for the elections. INEC had disclosed it was encountering problems recruiting ad-hoc staff as people anticipate widespread violence during the elections. It is also common knowledge that INEC has been loathe to pay the emoluments due its ad hoc staff in the past. It is not clear what the timeline is for the hiring and training of the ad-hoc staff within the coming weeks. As of March 29, "recruitment is underway," according to Iwu.

¶11. (SBU) As of March 14, 2007, INEC had just reportedly commissioned the Security Printing and Minting Company to print 400 million (rather than an earlier disclosed number of 240 million) ballot papers for the elections. The exclusion of disqualified candidates on the ballot papers and the capacity of the Minting Company to deliver the papers on time are outstanding concerns, even though Iwu has announced this week that the ballots had "already been printed." The ballot papers for presidential elections according to INEC would bear photographs of candidates. Analysts are concerned that this could lead to a delayed election, as INEC would have to reprint ballot papers if candidates currently challenging their disqualifications in court eventually won their cases.

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (SBU) Preparations for the 2007 elections compare negatively even to the relatively low standard set by those of 2003. Further, supposed gains from the lessons learned in 2003 have not been realized. With less than three weeks to the general elections, Nigerians still have a heightened anxiety, uncertainty, suspicion and widespread fear that the nation might be drifting to anarchy. The current assertive posture of the judiciary and the National Assembly provide a counterbalance to INEC's lack of transparency, but this has yet to calm the worst fears of the Nigerian public. END  
COMMENT.  
CAMPBELL